

Stand on a Line, and Invite Some True-Telling

by Jeanette Romkema

There are countless helpful ways to engage learners during a workshop or meeting. I get great joy designing ways to ensure purposeful and productive uses of solo and group activity. Indeed, there is no better feeling than leaving an event and knowing we achieved a lot... and had fun doing it!

However, sometimes I just need to check the pulse of a room. From time-to-time I want to get a quick sense of where people are at before going deeper into content or work.

Stand of a line is a technique that can help. It's easy and can offer surprising and helpful insights. In general, you need between 15-25 minutes.

Here's how it works:

1. **Determine what statement or question** you want people to weigh in on i.e. "We are a *healthy* team" or "The strategic plan over the past 3 years served us well and ensured our ongoing focus." Crafting your questions carefully will maximize the effectiveness of this technique.
2. **Determine where the imaginary line is in the room.** It is often best to have it run from one corner to another OR from one wall to another, running through an open area so people can easily move around. Then, clarify where 1 and 10 are.
3. **Give everyone a few minutes to consider your statement** and where they would like to stand on the continuum.
4. **Invite everyone to get up and stand on the line**, announcing their vote.
5. **Debrief with the group** by walking with a microphone (if the group is large) or by speaking loudly. Some questions to consider are:
 - a. *What do you notice about where people are standing?*
 - b. *Why are you standing at [#]?* Check in with a range of individuals at different places on the continuum.
 - c. *What would it take for you to move further on the continuum?*
 - d. *Where may you have stood [#] of months/years ago? Why? What has changed since then?*
6. **Reframe the statement** in some way to re-mix the group. This can help offer new information to consider for future work or dialogue i.e. Now stand where you hope we will be 1 year from now.
 - a. *What will be needed to help you move to this spot?*
 - b. *What more will be needed in [time] to continue your movement on the continuum?*
 - c. *What concerns do you have about getting to this place in [time]?*

Times to consider using this technique, include:



- **For a warm-up.** There is no better way to know how people are entering than to rate the topic of focus from the start.
- **At the end of the day.** It can be interesting to check the pulse after a whole day together, especially if it is a multi-year event. Your debriefing questions may reflect the timing in this way: Where may you have stood at the start of the day? Why are you standing where you are now after all you have learned here today?
- **At the start of a large activity or amount of work.** It can be helpful to know where people are at before starting, so adjustment can be made as needed.
- **After lunch.** This can be a great way to energy the group and sharpen the focus after being away from the work at hand.

NOTE: Be attentive to power dynamics in the room to ensure honest and open sharing.

Here are two sample activities used by GLP clients:

1. International Budget Partnership – 2-day knowledge sharing event [see handout]
2. Diaconal Ministries Canada – 2-day strategic planning event [see handout]

I look forward to using this technique again! It's quick and offers so much to a process and event.

What technique have you used to check the pulse of a group?

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